

ORM CORNER



"We Used a Crawl-Walk-Run Scenario . . ."

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A couple of years ago I was CO of USS *Dubuque* (LPD 8), home ported in Sasebo, Japan. One of the ORM issues we dealt with was to build a plan to have the ship's rescue swimmers be "really" ready to do their job. We felt the toughest scenario was a nighttime rescue in cold water, with high winds and high seas, and with the ship being unable to launch a boat. We used a "crawl-walk-run" scenario and built a series of training drills to achieve a level of expertise that we hoped we'd never have to use. We started in port and made sure all personnel on the forecastle, the bridge, CIC, and the swimmers knew their jobs and worked together as a team. We then moved to do it underway, putting Oscar in the water in relatively calm seas during the day and putting each of the rescue swimmers into the water to perform both a single-swimmer rescue, and a two-swimmer rescue requiring a stretcher.

We always briefed and immediately debriefed after each evolution. If we had rough edges we felt needed to be ironed out right then, we would re-do the event and point out what was different now and why it was different — we did this many times.

After a careful review of our readiness, we put a swimmer in the water after dark on a dark night. It was important for me that everyone was confident they could do it safely and also understood some of

the real-world "no-kidding" things that occurred in those conditions. For example, shining a searchlight might help see a person or object farther away, but it sure could blind a swimmer or the person in the water. If the swimmer's chemical light came off or was below the surface, it didn't do much good. We then did a practice rescue in rough weather during the day — 25 knots of wind and high seas. We had assessed the risks and felt we were ready.

Big lessons were that the spray from the waves made it much harder for the swimmer to see, he couldn't see as far, it was *much* harder to make headway, and lowering the swimmer and picking him up in the horse collar is much more difficult as the swimmer contends with six-to-nine-foot swells.

Also learned was the importance of positioning the ship upwind and perpendicular to the wind — all these were now much more important. I had never had a CO actually put a man in the water underway on previous ships but I felt — strongly — it is a scenario we must prepare for, and I felt this crawl-walk-run approach was the way to do business.

We sometimes confuse risk management with the avoidance of all risks, but the two are *not* the same. Our business can be hazardous, so we need to prepare for it by using ORM and building up to the capability to confidently handle numerous scenarios. ☺